

Record Series #: 1121-104

Name: W. W. Law Awards Collection

Dates: 1894-2005, no date

Extent/Size: 14 records cartons, 6 oversized boxes, 1 oversized folder (17.5 cubic feet)

Language: English

Name of Creator(s):

Westley Wallace Law; Geneva Wallace Law; W. W. Law Foundation

Biographical History:

W. W. Law (1923-2002) was a prominent Civil Rights leader, local historian, historic preservationist and community leader in Savannah, Georgia.

Westley Wallace Law was born on January 1, 1923 in Savannah, Georgia, the oldest of three children of Geneva Wallace and Westley Law. He was greatly influenced by his mother, Geneva W. Law, grandmother, Lillie Belle Wallace, mentor, Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert, and scoutmaster, John S. Delaware. Both Reverend Gilbert and John Delaware were officials in the Savannah chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Law joined the NAACP Youth Council in high school and later served as its president. He attended Georgia State Industrial College (now Savannah State University) before being drafted into the U. S. Army during World War II. After he completed his military service, he finished his bachelor's degree in biology. Law was a long-time boy scoutmaster for Troop 49 which was made up of boys from First Bryan Baptist Church, of which he was a member and Sunday school teacher. He was a mail carrier for the United States Postal Service for over forty years.

From 1950-1976 Law served as President of the Savannah chapter of the NAACP. During the 1960s, he led weekly mass meetings at Bolton Street Baptist Church and St. Philip A.M.E. Church during which he urged "passive resistance to segregation" and nonviolent protests. He was involved in efforts to desegregate Grayson Municipal Stadium, department store lunch counters on Broughton Street, and the beaches at Tybee Island. He led an eighteen-month boycott of Broughton Street merchants. Law is largely credited for helping to keep Savannah's Civil Rights movement more peaceful than those in other southern cities. In 1961, he was fired from his postal job because of his Civil Rights activities, but reinstated after national NAACP leaders and President John F. Kennedy came to his defense.

After finishing his run as NAACP president, he focused his efforts on preserving Savannah African American History. He established the Savannah-Yamacraw Branch of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), the King-Tisdell Cottage Museum, Beach Institute African American Cultural Center, the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, and the Negro Heritage Trail Tour. He also helped bring attention to and preserve Laurel Grove South Cemetery, the City's historically African American municipal cemetery.

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Law received honorary doctorates from the Savannah College of Art & Design and Savannah State University. He was honored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation for his preservation efforts in the community. W. W. Law died on July 28, 2002 at his home in Savannah. He willed his home and belongings to Remer K. Pendergraph who formed the W. W. Law Foundation to celebrate and continue the work of W. W. Law. The Foundation in turn donated his collections, documenting Savannah's civil rights movement, historic preservation, and African American history, to the City of Savannah for preservation and access to the public.

For more information on W. W. Law see:

Elmore, Charles J. "W. W. Law (1923-2002)." New Georgia Encyclopedia, last updated 10 January 2014 (available on the web at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/w-w-law-1923-2002>).

"The W. W. Law Foundation – About Us." W. W. Law Foundation, last updated 2012 (available on the web at <http://www.wwlawfoundation.org/the-ww-law-foundation/>).

Scope & Content:

The W. W. Law Awards collection includes over 170 awards and honors, the bulk of which were presented to W. W. Law during his lifetime for his activities and contributions, including in the areas of Civil Rights, community leadership, education, historic preservation, and history. There are also recognitions in honor of his mother, Geneva Wallace Law, sisters, Dorothy and Tessie, Robert W. Gadsden, and Reverend John Q. Adams. The awards are in a variety of formats, including plaques, certificates, medallions, trophies, and platters. Predominant materials include wood, glass, plastic, metal, and paper. Highlights of the collection include numerous state and regional awards recognizing W. W. Law's work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

System of Arrangement & Ordering:

The W. W. Law Awards Collection has been arranged intellectually into the following categories:

- Academic decorations of honor
- Adams, John Q.--Awards
- Awards
- Citizenship
- Civil rights
- Community leadership
- Education
- Historic preservation
- History

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Humanities
Law, Geneva Wallace--Awards
Meritorious service
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Philanthropist
Religion
Religion and citizenship
Sports
W. W. Law Foundation (Savannah, Ga.)

The awards were boxed by size, format, material, and condition to best facilitate storage and preservation. Inventories are available by category, date and box contents.

Conditions Governing Access:

None

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Access Points:

Academic decorations of honor
Adams, John Q.
African-American Family History Association
Awards
Citizenship.
Civil rights leaders (Savannah, Ga.).
Civil rights.
Community leadership.
Education.

1121-104-GSM-gau (USMARC)

City of Savannah, Research Library & Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia [GSG (OCLC/LYRASIS)]

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Gilbert, Ralph Mark, 1899-1956

Historic preservation.

Historic Savannah Foundation (Savannah, Ga.)

Law, Geneva Wallace

Law, W. W. (Westley Wallace), 1923-2002

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States

Olympic Games (26th : 1996 : Atlanta, Ga.)

Savannah College of Art and Design

Savannah State University (Ga.)

W. W. Law Foundation (Savannah, Ga.)

Sponsors/Funding:

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